PROGRESSIVE SERIES STUDIES

No. 1103 Grade 6-a

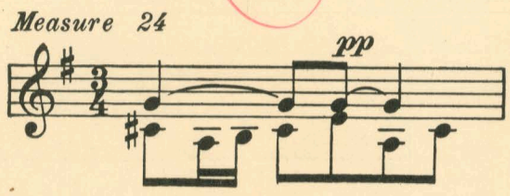
Three-Part Invention No. 7, in E Minor

Johann Sebastian Bach

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

The middle voice in measures 14, 15, and parallel passages should be subdued in order that the entrance of the soprano voice in the following measure may be given due prominence.

It is very difficult, as will be readily seen, to sustain the soprano G in measures 23 and 24 against the flow of the other two voices. It would be better, therefore, to repeat this note rather than to lose it entirely; as



It is obvious that this composition is to be played MOLTO ESPRESSIVO, but one should be extremely careful to avoid sentimentality.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Preface. The two- and three-part Inventions were written with the clearly expressed intention of furnishing a systematic school for the gradual learning and mastery of the special polyphonic technique of the piano. In order, therefore, to derive the greatest profit from this exceedingly important work, upon which the whole possibility of modern musical expression rests, the Inventions should be thoroughly studied from all angles, and with the help of such variants as transposition, reversing of hands, and the like. If this is done the player will be able to enter the now open door into the wonderful riches of polyphonic art.

Tempo. We shall not give any directions as to tempo and character of the music, which the student should expect to find valid under all conditions; for Bach himself refrained from giving any directions of this kind. Furthermore, a strict conformity to the tempo of a metronome was not in keeping with the character and style of Bach's time. We give the metronome tempos, therefore, merely as an incidental suggestion.

Dynamic Shading. In the matter of dynamic shading, also, the composer has given no indication whatever of his preferences. While it may appear, therefore, that Bach wished to allow the player the fullest possible freedom of interpretation, we must remember, on the other hand, that, so far as concerned the cembalo (harpsichord) and, to a lesser degree, the organ of his day, one could not execute on them such directions as *diminuendi, crescendi, mf, mp, pp, ff.*

If, now, we look for a moment at the fine arts, we discover that etchings and other works in black and white, though different, are quite as effective as those pictures in which color has been lavishly used. The music of Bach is like the best work in black and white, where the artist achieves his results, not by any rich coloring, but by accuracy of line and shading. To speak more precisely, in playing Bach we should keep up a uniformly distributed, unchanging dynamic throughout a given musical phrase or period, and change it *abruptly* upon beginning a new phrase or period. And we should avoid as far as possible such helps as *crescendos* and *diminuendos,* which we have found so advantageous in other species of composition.

Phrasing. Since this ⌒ sign has to answer three purposes, namely,

1) the legato (with its modifications)
2) phrasing
3) tying,

we are beginning now quite generally in editions of musical works to introduce a new kind of symbols. We are using the same symbols which are used to indicate the thought connections of the component parts of a printed sentence; that is, punctuation marks. We shall use the comma (,) to indicate very light breaks in the musical sentence or utterance, and for the larger, more important pauses (like a breathing between phrases), the semicolon (;).

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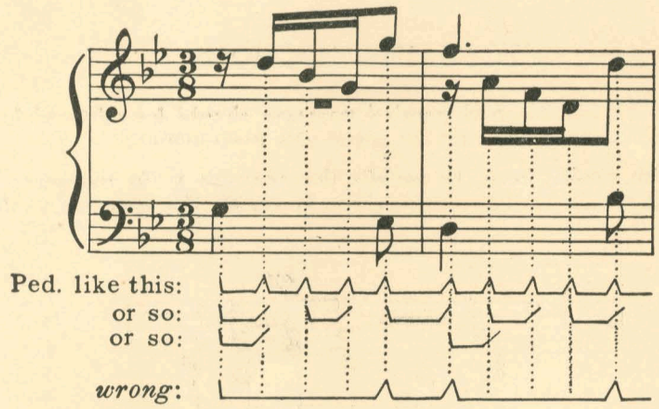
Three-Part Invention No. 7, in E Minor BACH

Method of Playing Imitation Passages. Whenever a motive, a theme, a phrase is taken over and imitated by the following voice, we should proceed on the principle of picture and its reflection, voice and its echo, an experience and the recollection of that experience. The leading intensity should remain uninterruptedly with the voice which announces the new thought, while the imitating voice should be kept in a secondary and more or less shadowy relationship.

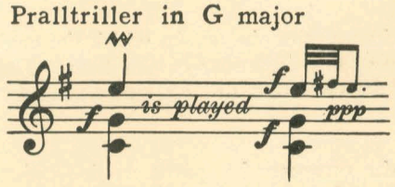
Pedal. The damper pedal should always be used only in connection with its lightening and brightening function, or to support a legato. Accordingly, its harmonizing function is strictly excluded; as, for example, the following:



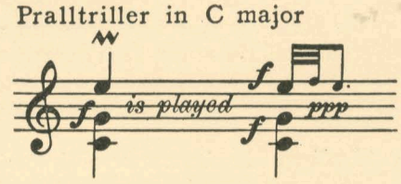
Embellishments. *Trills.* We wish here to say a word in favor of the "free trill" executed without any attempt at grouping or accent; partly because this method of execution is more beautiful, partly because it fits well into the pedagogical objective of this work; namely, a perfectly independent interpretation of the voices or parts. The free trill is more or less rapidly played, maintaining throughout the utmost smoothness of execution, but *without* conscious rhythmic subdivisions. Exceptions to this rule will be noted as they occur in the particular pieces.

The *Pralltriller* and *Mordent.* Generally speaking, we should execute an embellishment with the auxiliary note next in the scale in which we are at the moment; that is, in the case of the pralltriller, with the next note above, in the case of the mordent, with the next note below. We should begin the pralltriller *with* the beat (not before), and with the same degree of force as is given the remaining leading notes. The second and third notes of the pralltriller, on the contrary, should be given a more or less shadowy character.

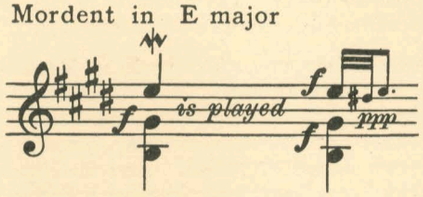
Pralltriller in G major



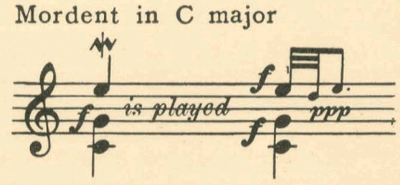
Therefore:
Pralltriller in C major



Mordent in E major



Mordent in C major



Fingering. The fingering often appears to be inconvenient, but this fingering has been adopted for the distinct purpose of bringing out clearly such articulation and interrelationships (interpunctuations, so to speak) as the thought of the passage demands.

Technique of Sustained Notes. In playing three-voiced piano music one ought to bear well in mind the fact that sustained notes must be played with special intensity, and that the other voices should be subdued in order that the listener may hear the prolonged tone throughout the whole of its duration. This special care is particularly necessary when the long notes occur in the treble portion of the piano, because this end of the instrument is its weakest part and its short strings are least able to sustain tones.

On the other hand we must remember that the art of refined polyphonic piano-playing consists in the fine balancing of the different tone-values against each other in such a way that the manner of playing mentioned in the preceding paragraph does not result in a distorted exaggeration.

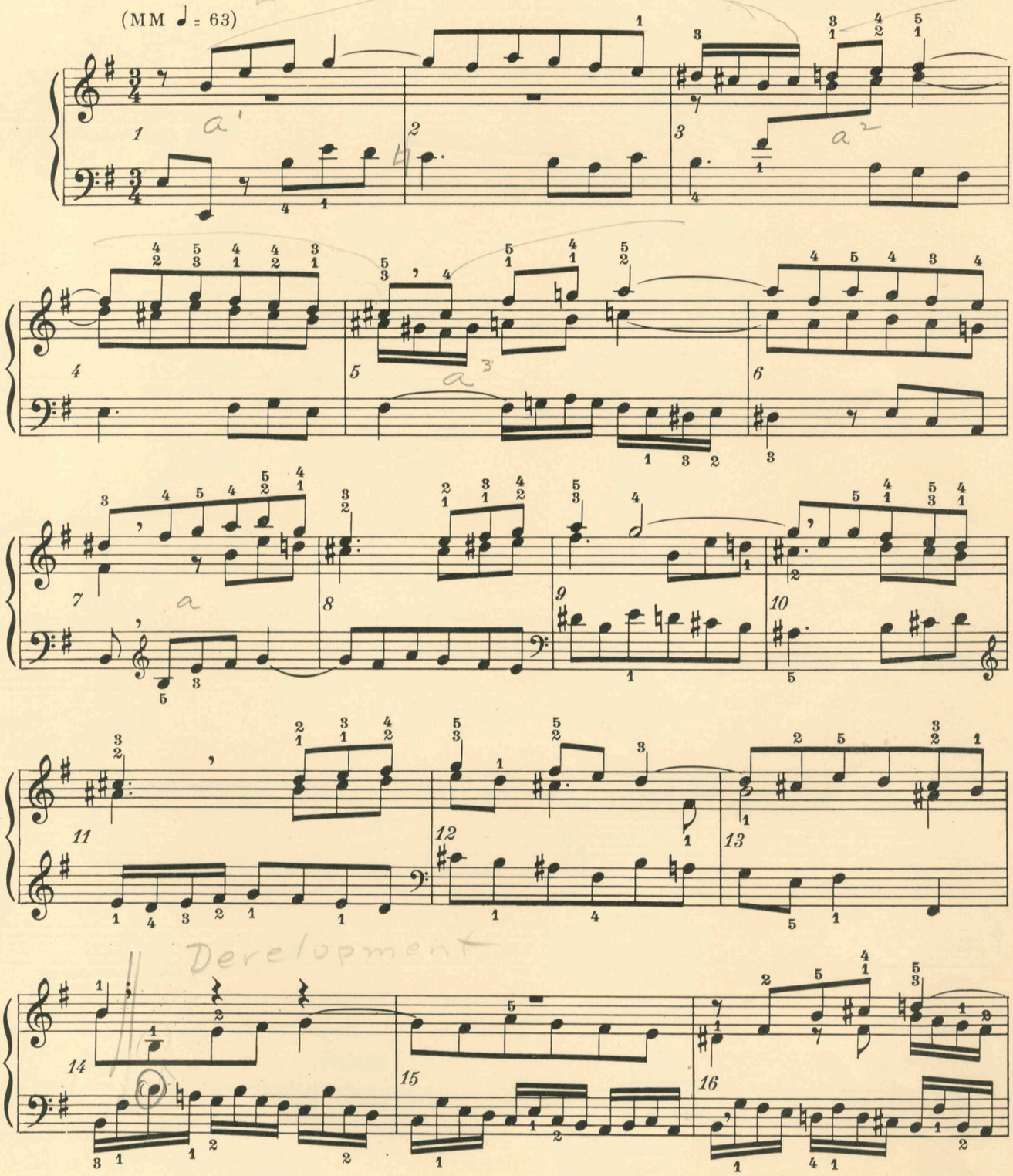
Three-Part Invention in E minor

No. 7

Selected and edited by
Gottfried Galston

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

(MM ♩ = 63)



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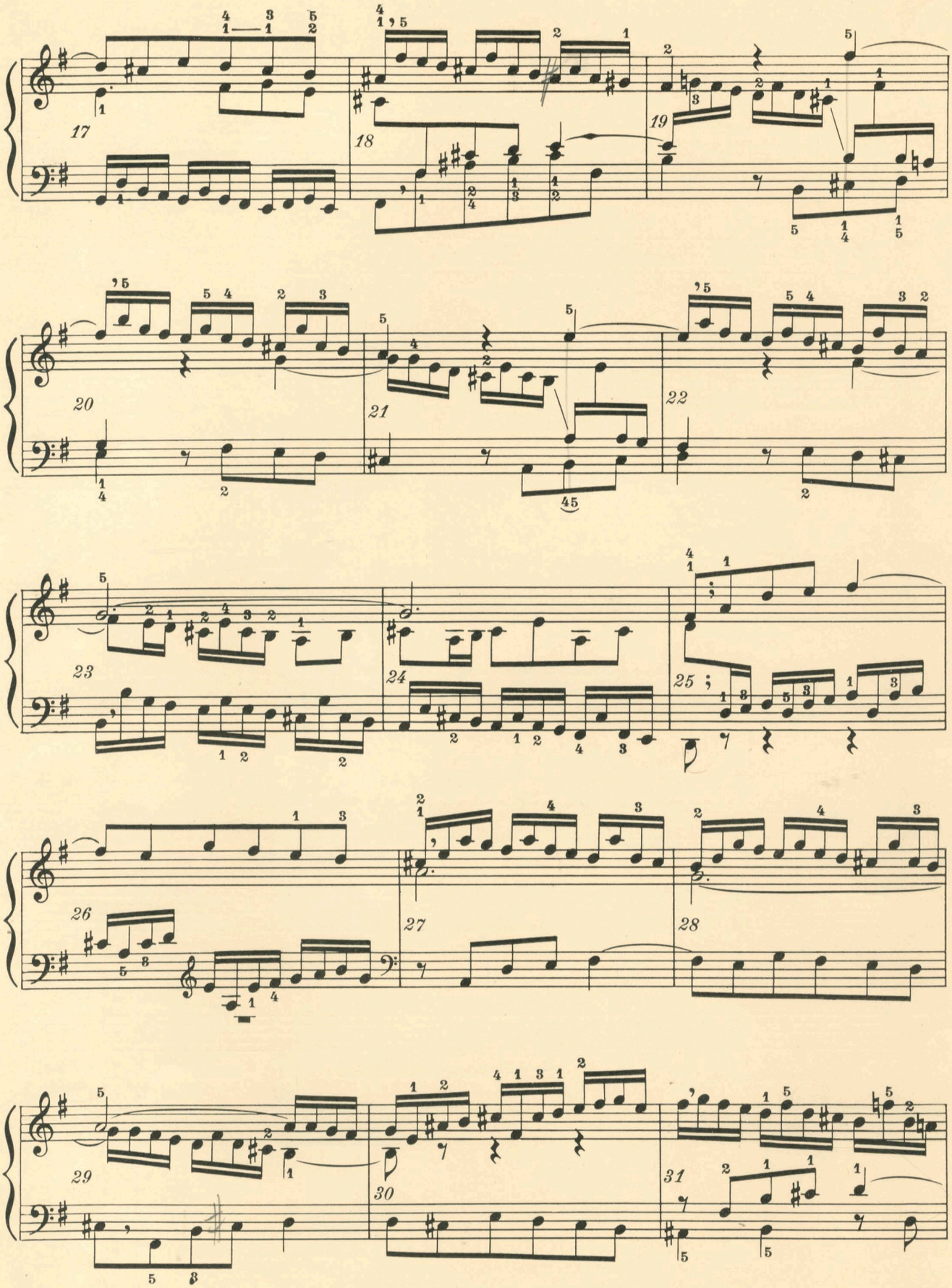

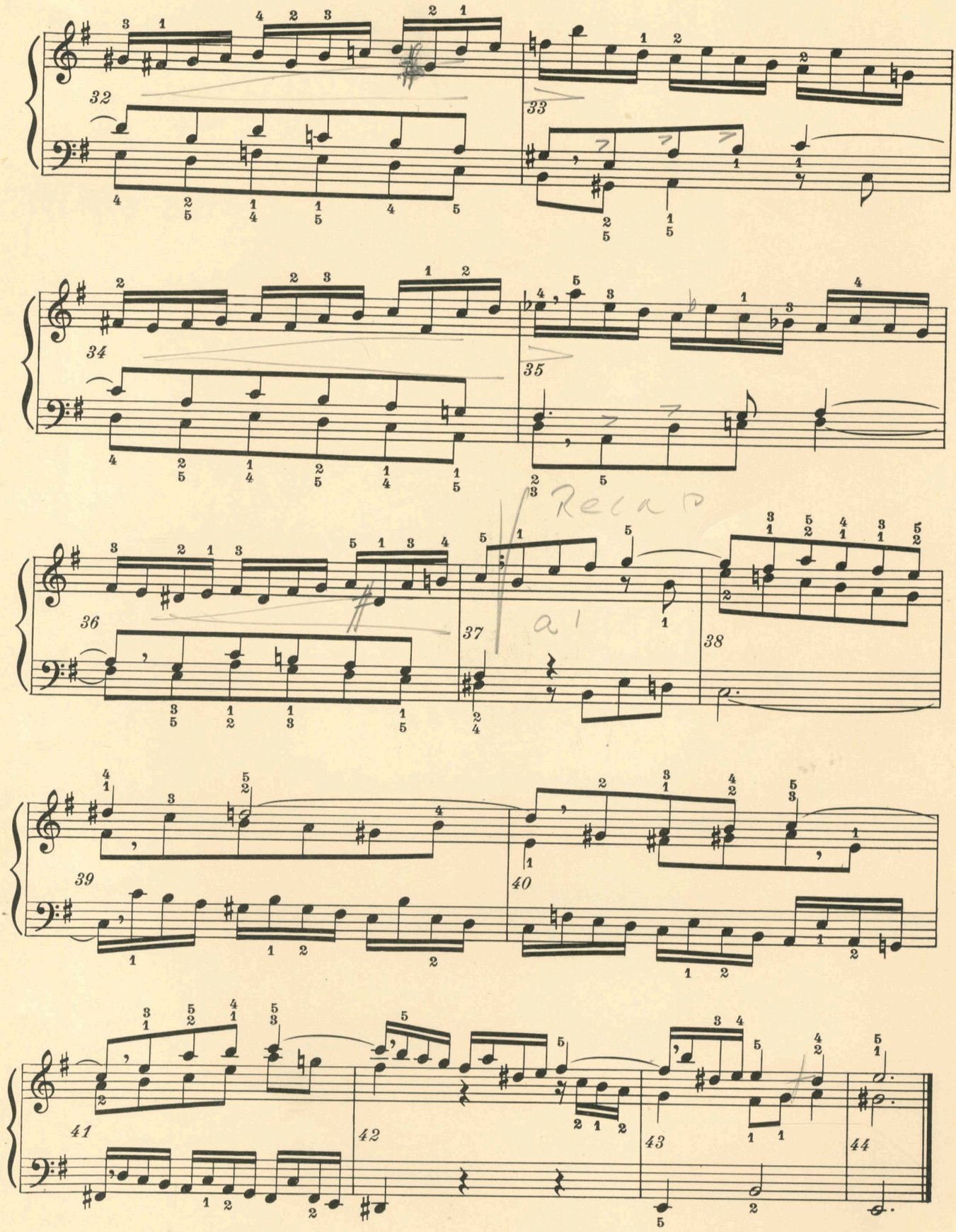
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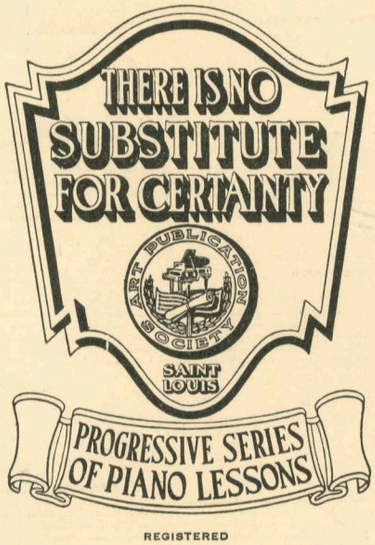
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